



Little River Canyon National Preserve
Draft General Management Plan and
Environmental Impact Statement
1999

DRAFT

**GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

**LITTLE RIVER CANYON NATIONAL PRESERVE
DeKalb and Cherokee Counties, Alabama**

ABSTRACT

This *Draft General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement* describes two alternatives for managing the Preserve's natural and cultural resources and visitor use. Desired future conditions, or goals, for resources and the visitor experience are presented in the proposed alternative, followed by general implementation strategies. The desired conditions include protecting the area's natural attributes and values while improving the visitor experience through greater educational efforts and providing safe and convenient facilities. While visitor use would be managed to achieve desired conditions, no substantial change in existing visitor use patterns is proposed. An increase in staffing is included in the proposal. The "no action" alternative would generally continue existing conditions, likely resulting in a deterioration of some resources and the visitor experience over time. Environmental impacts that would occur from implementing either alternative are addressed. Impact topics include water resources, fish and wildlife, vegetation, cultural resources, the visitor experience and the local community.

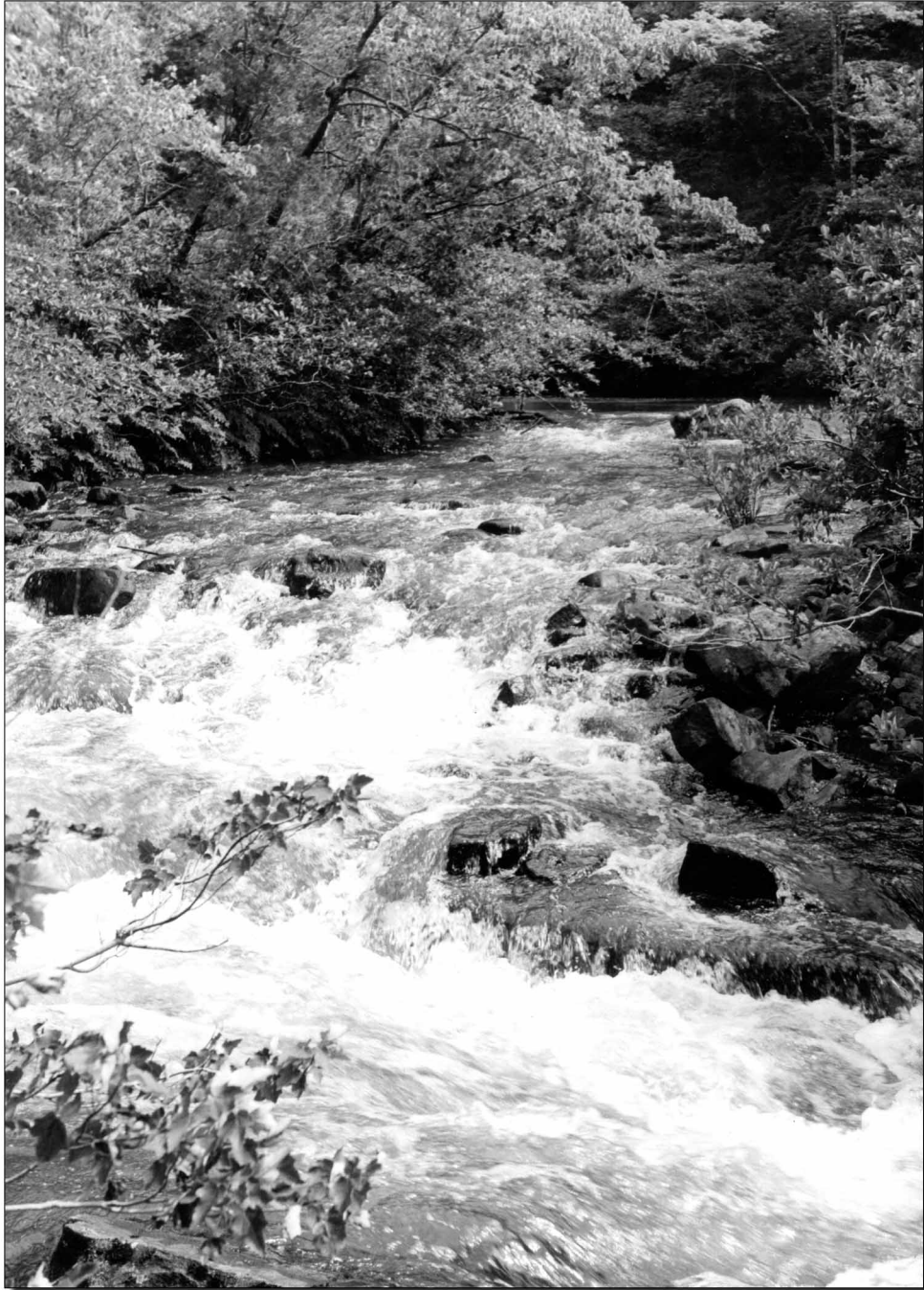
Written comments on this document will be accepted for a period of 60 days and should be sent to:

Superintendent
Little River Canyon National Preserve
2141 Gault Avenue North
Ft. Payne, Alabama 35967

Telephone: (256)845-9605
E-mail address: liri_administration@nps.gov

Public meetings to receive oral or written comments will be scheduled during the review period.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Southeast Regional Office



A short section of rapids on Little River



Summary

Little River Canyon National Preserve was established by Congress in 1992 to preserve the area's natural, scenic, recreational, and cultural resources and provide for public enjoyment of those resources. A 14,000-acre area was to be set aside from lands owned by the State of Alabama, Cherokee County, and Alabama Power Company. This general management plan has been prepared to satisfy the requirements of the National Parks and Recreation Act, Public Law 95-625, and National Park Service policy which requires the preparation of a general management plan for all units of the national park system. This is the first general management plan for the Preserve.

Because this is a general management plan, this plan presents only broad strategies for resource management and visitor use. Two alternatives are presented: a proposal and a "no action" alternative representing a general continuation of existing conditions.

The proposal describes desired future conditions, or management goals, for visitor use and enjoyment and the Preserve's resources. General implementation strategies are then outlined to guide their achievement.

The proposal describes visitor experience goals for three distinct areas of the Preserve, i.e., the canyon, the developed areas around the canyon, and the forested uplands north of the canyon. The canyon would remain as natural as possible, where visitors enter only on foot or by float craft. The developed areas would provide the means for most visitors to enjoy the scenic views and simple activities such as picnicking. The forested uplands would provide a variety of recreation opportunities. With the possible exception of a small maintenance facility, the only development contemplated would be the rehabilitation or improvement of certain traditional recreation sites. More information for visitor understanding and appreciation would be provided. The quality and diversity of the Preserve's resources would be determined through comprehensive inventories and maintained through proactive management. Improvement would be undertaken where practical. Effective implementation of the proposal would require additional staffing and a maximum of \$365,000 added to the Preserve's operating base. No expansion of the current boundary is proposed.

The "no action" alternative assumes a general continuation of existing conditions which allows only responses to resource and visitor use needs without benefit of a comprehensive plan.

Anticipated impacts of the proposal include the benefits of increased knowledge and protection of Preserve resources and a greater appreciation by the public. The minor development activity would include appropriate erosion and sedimentation controls and would have insignificant effects on water quality, wildlife and vegetation.

With a continuation of existing conditions, i.e., "no action," Preserve resources would likely be adversely impacted over the long term as use increases and conditions deteriorate due to cumulative effects. The visitor experience would be expected to also deteriorate over time.

The Next Step...

Following review of this draft plan/environmental impact statement, a final plan/environmental impact statement will be prepared which responds to the comments received. Thirty days after the final document is made available, a Record of Decision will be prepared to document the selected alternative.



View of rim looking up from canyon floor



Middle section of Little River Falls



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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION / PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PLAN

Brief Description of the Preserve and Its Significance

Little River Canyon National Preserve is located in northeast Alabama in Cherokee and DeKalb Counties. The 14,000-acre Preserve contains an outstanding example of an Appalachian Plateau Province canyon system. The canyon and the nearly pristine Little River together form one of the extraordinary natural features of Alabama. Early in 1997, the Alabama Environmental Council named Little River Canyon one of the state's top ten natural wonders. The Preserve is biologically diverse and home to a number of rare plants and animals. It supports numerous recreation pursuits, ranging from the simple and passive to the extremely challenging. A 23-mile canyon rim drive provides easy access to superlative scenic views. DeSoto State Park operates overnight and food service facilities inside the boundary of the Preserve.

The significance of the Preserve is summarized in statements that capture the essence of its important natural, cultural, recreational, scientific and other values.

- The Preserve's stream resources are excellent in quality, and Little River is classified by the State of Alabama as an Outstanding National Resource Water.
- Little River is one of a very few river systems with most of its length atop a mountain (plateau).
- The Preserve lies at the southern limits of the Cumberland Plateau, contributing to significant biological diversity including habitat for a unique assemblage of plants and animals.
- The Preserve contains one of the most extensive canyon systems in the Southern Appalachians.
- The Preserve contains some of the most rugged scenery in the southeast.

- Little River Canyon is the deepest canyon in Alabama and one of the deepest in the eastern United States.
- Outstanding scenic vistas are found along the rim of the canyon.
- Archeological resources and historic sites exist.
- A diverse array of resource-based recreation opportunities exists within the Preserve.
- Little River within the canyon provides opportunity for world class whitewater boating.
- The Preserve is within a 2-3 hour drive of Atlanta, Birmingham, and other major metropolitan areas and is within a day's drive of much of the east and midwest sections of the country.

Legislation and the Purpose of the Preserve

Little River Canyon National Preserve was established and made a unit of the national park system by Public Law 102-427 on October 21, 1992. According to the legislation, the Preserve was established to protect and preserve the natural, scenic, recreational and cultural resources of the area and to provide for public enjoyment of those resources.

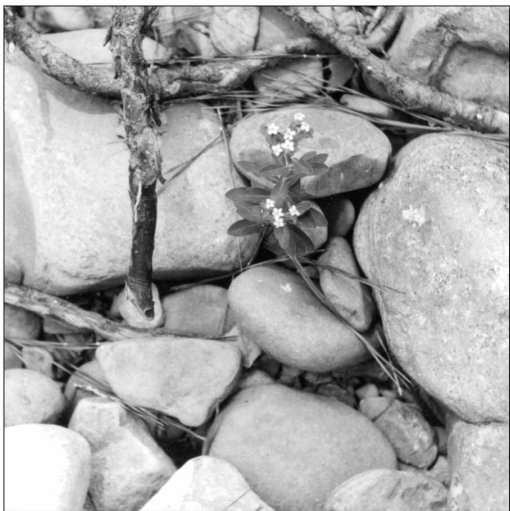
The Preserve's authorizing legislation goes on to state that the Preserve will be administered in accordance with laws generally applicable to units of the national park system. Besides general direction in these laws that resources be protected and appropriate visitor uses be accommodated, Congress requires that "The authorization of activities shall be construed and the protection, management, and administration of these areas shall be conducted in light of the high public value and integrity of the national park system and shall not be

exercised in derogation of the values and purposes for which these various areas have been established, except as may have been or shall be directly and specifically provided by Congress.” (92 Stat. 163, 16 U.S.C. 1a-1)

One such exception provided by Congress for Little River Canyon National Preserve is that hunting and trapping will be permitted in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. The legislation provides that the times and places for hunting within the Preserve will be established by the National Park Service in consultation with the State of Alabama and adjacent land owners. Public safety and resource protection are the primary considerations of such consultation.

The Preserve’s legislation also establishes a boundary and prohibits expansion of that boundary without the approval of Congress. No lands may be acquired without the consent of the owner.

Preserve legislation also provides for the application of section 7(a) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to Little River within the Preserve. This section protects Little River from federal or federally assisted water resource projects that would adversely affect the river’s qualities.



A wildflower blooms on the bank of Little River

Preserve Goals and Objectives

The Preserve’s broad mission goals are as follows:

Natural and cultural resources and associated values are protected, restored and maintained in good condition and managed within their broader contexts.

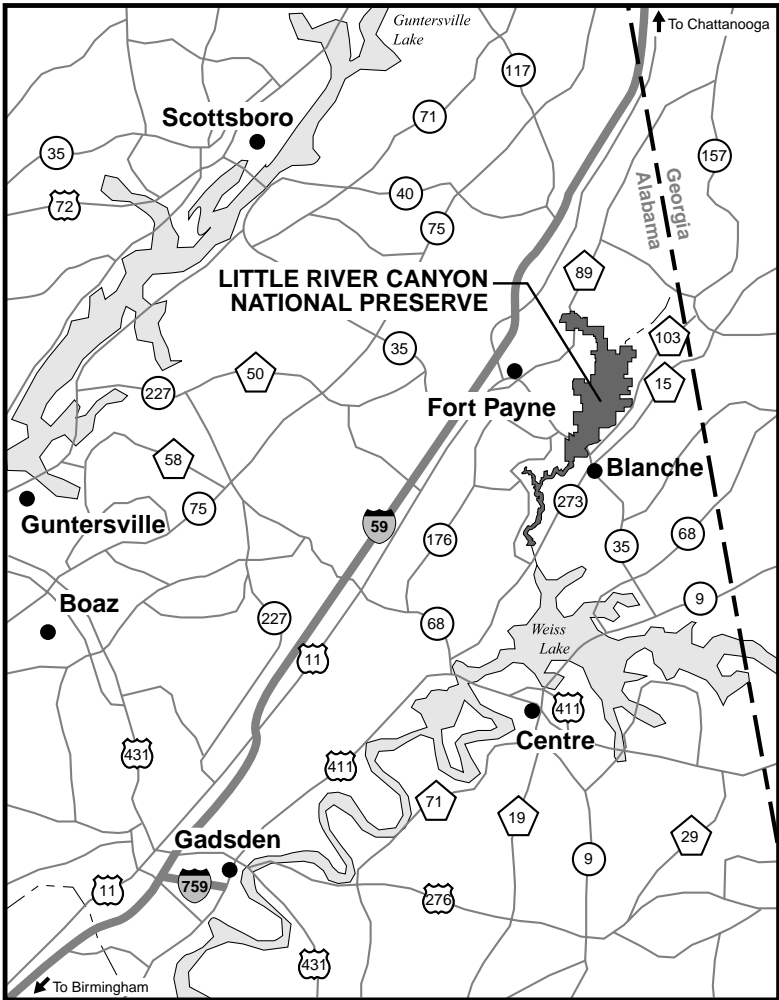
- Visitors safely enjoy and are satisfied with the availability, accessibility, diversity and quality of appropriate facilities, services and recreation opportunities.
- The Preserve uses current management practices, systems and technologies to accomplish its mission.

The following management objectives provide additional guidance:

- Obtain active public input and participation in NPS planning and management of the Preserve.
- Create opportunities for people to learn about and experience the extraordinary natural, cultural and recreation resources of the Preserve.
- Manage the Preserve’s natural, cultural and recreation resources to assure their perpetuation for public appreciation and enjoyment.
- Restore and maintain natural systems to assure biodiversity and proper natural community structure within the Preserve.
- Maintain a level of water quality that will sustain the river’s assemblage of plants and animals, will conform to the river’s status as “Outstanding National Resource Water” and will allow traditional river and river-related recreation.
- Inventory, evaluate and protect cultural resources within the Preserve.
- Cooperate with the Alabama Division of Game and Fish in providing opportunities for hunting, trapping and fishing within appropriate areas of the Preserve.
- Accommodate resource-based recreation without compromising the natural and cultural values of the Preserve.

Primary Planning and Management Issues

The basic issue is how to apply the body of laws, policies and regulations that affect NPS-administered areas to what is now the Preserve. NPS policy provides



Region and Vicinity Maps

a framework for this application. Substantive questions the plan will address are:

What is needed to preserve the area's natural, cultural and recreation resources in good condition and manage them in their broader contexts?

What visitor experiences are appropriate?

What general types and amounts of facilities and services would appropriately serve Preserve visitors and be compatible with Preserve resources?

The General Management Plan

Public input and an array of laws, regulations and policies provide the NPS with the guidance necessary to

develop plans for how parks will be managed. The basic planning document is the General Management Plan which prescribes how the Preserve purpose and management objectives will be achieved; what uses will be accommodated and where; what development will be required to accommodate recreation uses, facilitate administration and protect resource values; and how resources will be preserved and protected. Being a framework plan, the General Management Plan allows for preparation of specific separate plans for development, visitor use management and resource management. However, these plans must be consistent with the General Management Plan. The General Management Plan is normally applicable for at least 10-15 years but can be revised any time that new issues arise or management objectives change. Any change is always a public process.



Little River Canyon



Chapter Two

THE AFFECTED PRESERVE ENVIRONMENT

Natural Resources

Little River Canyon is the most well known feature of the Preserve. The highly scenic views of the canyon are a primary resource. Long-range views into the surrounding area are also possible from some locations. The river is unusual in that it flows for most of its length atop a relatively flat-topped mountain (Lookout Mountain). Over its last 15 miles, the river and its tributaries have cut an extensive and winding canyon system.

In 1969, the State of Alabama designated the portion of Little River within the canyon a State Wild and Scenic River. The legislation that established the Preserve provided the added protection of section 7(a) of the national Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to protect the qualities of the river from federal and federally assisted water resource-related projects that would adversely affect the values of Little River.

Little River is a relatively unpolluted river according to existing information. No towns or industries empty wastewater into the river. The river is classified by the state for public water supply, water contact sports, and fish and wildlife. In 1991, the State of Alabama designated the river an Outstanding National Resource Water (ONRW) which is designed to prevent degradation of existing quality and limits point-source discharges along any stream so designated. The Alabama Division of Environmental Management provides oversight for the ONRW program.

In terms of water quantity, flows are highly variable and range from torrential to virtually no flow between the deeper pools.

Aquatic ecology in the river system is significant. The waters support the threatened Kral's water plantain that may occur nowhere else, the threatened blue shiner and possibly endangered freshwater mussels. The ecology needs to be better understood and systematically monitored and managed. A study is underway to document the presence and diversity of the mussels in the Preserve.

Forest types of the Preserve are those commonly found in the Cumberland Plateau section of the Southern Appalachians. Oaks and hickories dominate in the areas along the canyon rim and upriver on the rolling surface of the top of Lookout Mountain. Pines dominate on the dry slopes and rocky areas of the canyon rim. There are approximately 8,500 acres in the Preserve open to hunting. These 8,500 acres are also part of a larger Little River Wildlife Management Area. Inside the Preserve, this area is managed and maintained by NPS with the Alabama Division of Game and Fish carrying out some wildlife management practices (maintaining wildlife forage openings, keeping records on wildlife harvest statistics, etc.) under the terms of a memorandum of understanding between NPS and the division. When Alabama Power Company owned this area, timbering occurred sporadically, and planted pine plantations of generally less than 10 acres often supplanted the previous forest cover. These practices, along with associated road building, resulted in a patchwork of disturbance within this area.

The Preserve is a biological mixing place where some plants more common to the north, e.g., rhododendrons and mountain laurel, find their southernmost extension and where other species more common on the coastal plain find a northern extension. One plant, Wright's Sunny-bells, does not occur anywhere between Lookout Mountain and the mountains of western Texas.

Common wildlife species include white-tailed deer, turkeys, squirrels, rabbits, and raccoons. Coyotes and bobcats are also seen. Some salamanders reach their southernmost extension in the canyon. The state monitors the wild game harvest.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lists the following species as endangered (E) or threatened (T) which occur or may occur in the Preserve area:

- *Myotis grisescens* — gray bat (E)
- *Haliaeetus leucocephalus* — bald eagle (T)
- *Cyprinella caerulea* — blue shiner (T)
- *Medionidus parvulus* — Coosa moccasin-shell mussel (E)

- *Sarracenia oreophila* — green pitcher plant (E)
- *Ptilimnium nodosum* — harperella (E)
- *Sagittaria secundifolia* — Kral's water plantain (T)

Other rare species that are believed to exist in the area include:

- *Lilium speculae* — Ownbeys onion
- *Cuscuta harperi* — Harper's dodder
- *Talinum mengesii* — Quill flower
- *Percina lenticula* — Freckled darter
- *Desmognathus ochrophaeus* — Mountain dusky salamander
- *Lampropeltis tranquillum* — Eastern milksnake

Cultural Resources

Prehistoric and historic resources and sites are known to exist, and many more are believed to be present. These include prehistoric hunt camp sites, middens and rockshelters and historic traces, fords and homesites. A foot bridge and culverts built by the CCC are the only historic structures. Archeological sites have been looted in many instances, but some are relatively untouched. Research potential is high since these resources are only partially defined.

Little is known about ethnographic resources in the Preserve and an assessment of such resources is needed. Since the general area was inhabited by Cherokee Indians prior to about 1840, there is the possibility of resources important to the Cherokees occurring in the Preserve, and coordination and consultation will be undertaken to assure any warranted ethnographic resource protection and interpretation. Sites now within the Preserve that have long been used by the public for recreation represent another type of ethnographic resource and are discussed in the following section.

Recreation Resources and Use

The area that is now the Preserve has supported recreational use for a long time. Prior to establishment of the Preserve, visitors frequented virtually the entire area, including various sites along the river, the state park facilities including the canyon rim drive, the county park at the canyon mouth, and the wildlife management area.

Traditional uses of the river and associated beaches and ledges remain popular with nearby residents in both Alabama and Georgia and include swimming, picnicking, fishing and sunbathing. Use is heavy at popular sites

during the warm season and is generally unrestricted. This type of use will likely increase over time. Little River Falls is a major focal point of traditional use, and a paved parking area and trail have been constructed by NPS to provide safer conditions and easier access. River fords exist in two locations and are the primary means for gaining access to the river above Alabama Highway 35. Trails afford access to the river at other locations.

Floating the river is popular and includes canoeing, kayaking, and rafting. A strong sense of solitude prevails in certain reaches, particularly within the canyon. The canyon reach offers challenging whitewater boating in season—usually winter and spring.

Traditional use of the canyon includes driving for pleasure along the rim drive, viewing/sightseeing, hiking and occasional picnicking. Highway 176 hugs the canyon rim from Highway 35 to about midway along the canyon before turning west and leaving the Preserve. From this point, a narrower, more winding, county road continues along the rim to the canyon mouth. Average annual daily traffic on Highway 176 has been calculated as high as 240 vehicles over the portion closest to Highway 35, probably including the nearest overlooks. The rim drive is generally inside the Preserve boundary, but there are sections where the road is outside the Preserve. Along the rim drive are a number of overlooks offering views of the canyon. Use of this drive and overlooks probably represents the most significant single activity in the Preserve. Parking is accommodated at the overlook sites. Picnic tables are provided at most sites. A TVA power line crosses the canyon at one overlook.

The canyon walls offer superlative climbing opportunities, and people travel long distances to climb here. Numerous climbing routes exist along the canyon's easily accessed west side.

Along with the canyon rim drive, DeSoto State Park facilities in the far northern portion of the Preserve are the most popular visitor facilities. They include a lodge and cabins, restaurant, campground, picnic area, circulatory roads and trails, visitor information center, store, a manager's residence and maintenance area. Annual visitation to this state park has been in the 300,000-350,000 range for several years and probably represents at least 80 to 90 percent of the visitation to what is now the Preserve. This visitation may be expected to increase once the Preserve is better known.

Traditional recreation use of the forested uplands north of Highway 35 includes hiking, hunting, horseback riding and driving on the back roads.

The roads in the upland area are primitive and receive periodic maintenance, although some sections become impassable in wet weather. Use is typically for hunting, although increased pressure for general recreation use may be expected.

Trails exist in many places, but only a few are formally designated. Most trails have been created by users desiring access to some particular area. Camping within the Preserve is only permitted at several designated primitive camps in the wildlife management area and the state park's developed campgrounds.

The wildlife management area offers hunting in season for deer, turkey and small game. Trapping is also permitted in season. The area provides approximately 5,000 hunter-days annually and complements the state park by providing opportunities for other outdoor activities.

The area known as "Canyon Mouth Park" was previously owned by Cherokee County and offered access to the river and the canyon. It was popular for picnicking, swimming and fishing. The area is subject to flooding and, in October 1995, was severely damaged by high water conditions caused by Hurricane Opal. The National Park Service has renovated and reopened the site as a day-use area. It is again popular, with visitation at capacity (about 60-100 cars at one time) frequently during the warm season.

With only visitor statistics for DeSoto State Park and hunting in the wildlife management area, a gross estimate of current Preserve visitation is 375,000. This figure may be expected to slowly increase to around 500,000 within 10 years. This growth is expected to consist mainly of persons visiting from outside the local area.

Regional Setting

The Little River watershed covers approximately 200 square miles atop Lookout Mountain. Significant land uses include agriculture and recreation. Timber harvesting occurs in areas around the Preserve and is



Canoeists enjoy the day on Little River

expected to continue. Summer camps and permanent and seasonal residences have been popular and are becoming more numerous on Lookout Mountain. The town of Mentone, just north of the Preserve, has been a tourist attraction for some time. The popularity of Lookout Mountain for vacationers and others seeking homesites may be expected to increase.

A few abandoned coal strip mines exist along the east fork outside the Preserve boundary. These sites are relatively small and most are at least partially reclaimed through natural processes. A 1997 water quality study conducted for the Preserve by Jacksonville State University indicates these sites are no threat to water quality. No recent mining interests are reported for the area.

Highway 35 is a two-lane, modern highway serving as a primary connection between Fort Payne/Interstate 59 and points east. While the highway crosses the Preserve perpendicularly and is only within the Preserve for approximately one mile, it is a major influence. The route is the primary access route to the Preserve for local users and tourists, and it also carries high speed auto and truck traffic through the Preserve near the popular Little River Falls area. Plans are being developed to someday widen the highway to four lanes and construct a new bridge over Little River immediately north of the existing one. However, studies of the possible widening are still underway.

The Preserve is within 2-3 hours of Atlanta, Birmingham, and several other major metropolitan areas and is within a day's drive of much of the east and midwest sections of the country. Accessibility is enhanced by its proximity to Interstate 59. A possible corridor for an Atlanta-to-Memphis highway has been identified immediately south of the Preserve. If completed on such a location, the highway would undoubtedly result in additional Preserve visitors.

A more detailed description of what is now the Preserve and its nearby surroundings may be found in the NPS

publication, *Special Resource Study: Little River Canyon Area, Cherokee, DeKalb and Etowah Counties, Alabama*, which was prepared to assist Congress in its consideration of establishing the Preserve. The description in that document is incorporated here by reference.

Preserve Operations and Staffing

The Preserve's administrative function is located in leased space in Fort Payne. This occurred when the Preserve was first established and prior to land acquisition. It has continued to be advantageous for local contacts and because the facility also serves Russell Cave National Monument located to the north.

The Preserve's ranger facility is located in leased space on top of Lookout Mountain outside the Preserve. Because of the road network, its location permits sufficient response times to the northern and southern portions of the Preserve as well as the center.

Preserve management expects to enter into a partnership to help staff a future facility to be built by others adjacent to the Preserve and Highway 35. In addition to educational/research functions, the facility would serve the public visiting the Preserve by providing information and emergency response. For the present, Preserve staff regularly patrols key areas during heavier use periods.

The Preserve's current annual operating budget is approximately \$750,000. Staffing includes:

- 1 Manager
- 1 Administrative Officer
- 1 Procurement Officer
- 1 Secretary
- 3 full-time Protection Rangers
- 1-2 seasonal Protection Rangers
- 1 full-time Interpretive Ranger
- 3 subject-to-furlough Maintenance Workers
- 1 full-time Resource Management Specialist
- 1 Student Intern (Resource Management)



Chapter Three

ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

INTRODUCTION

The range of alternatives considered has been limited. This is due to the fact that the area included within the Preserve boundary has been mostly managed by public entities for public recreation over a considerable length of time. The existence of DeSoto State Park, Cherokee County's Canyon Mouth Park, and the Alabama Game and Fish Division's wildlife management area has led to certain patterns of public use which are not inconsistent with Preserve legislation. Acting on the findings of the National Park Service's earlier Special Resource Study on the area, Congress authorized acquisition of lands only from State and local government and Alabama Power Company. This indicated that significant changes in land ownership and use were not envisioned.

This conclusion was further supported by the planning process, which has not identified any significant suggestions for change. In fact, public input may be characterized as suggesting that there should be no significant change. In the absence of substantial preservation and use issues, this first general management plan for the Preserve deals with the application of NPS management policies to an area previously managed by others for recreation. Therefore, only two basic alternatives have been considered — the proposed action consisting of the identification of management units and their desired future conditions and the alternative of "no action" (continuing existing conditions), which is considered to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

PROPOSED ACTION

The following discussion describes the strategy preferred by the NPS for visitor use and resource management and represents the proposed General Management Plan for the Preserve.

Management Units

A General Management Plan is the document that prescribes the NPS system of management units for park

lands and waters. These units are then used to designate various strategies for management and use that will achieve the purpose of the Preserve and best fulfill management goals. Three basic units are proposed for this initial plan. They are generally defined below and are portrayed on the accompanying map.

- **Natural Unit:** This unit is the canyon. It consists of those lands and waters within the Preserve south of Little River Falls. Lands and waters designated as a natural unit are managed principally to conserve natural resources and ecological processes and to provide for their use and enjoyment by the public in ways that do not adversely affect these resources and processes.
- **Development Unit:** This unit includes the canyon rim road with its overlooks (those portions within the Preserve boundary) and the NPS visitor facilities at the canyon mouth and at Little River Falls. Lands designated as a development unit are managed to provide and maintain NPS facilities. The minimum area is so designated, and as natural an environment as possible will be maintained.
- **Special Use Unit:** This unit includes all of the remaining lands and waters in the Preserve—essentially, the forested plateau from Highway 35 northward. This designation is used for this area due to cooperative arrangements with other agencies. These arrangements apply to the wildlife management area, DeSoto State Park, and Highway 35. It also includes the right-of-way for the TVA power line crossing the canyon.

It is appropriate here to state that no expansion of the authorized boundaries is contemplated. The proposed designation of management units would apply only to lands inside the current Preserve boundary.

Visitor Experience

Within the management units, the visitor experience would differ according to the resources present and the degree of facility development. The desired future

condition (management goal) for the visitor experience in each unit is described, followed by general strategies for achieving those conditions.

Natural Unit/Desired Future Visitor Experience

The canyon presents to the visitor a superlative natural setting. The air is clear, and views across and within the canyon are unhindered. Development within the canyon consists of a few foot trails. Visitors are typically engaged in physically challenging activities such as hiking or rock climbing. Those floating the river experience it on its own terms. A sense of solitude is easily achieved. Canyon visitors are generally aware of the safety precautions needed.

Development Unit/Desired Future Visitor Experience

Visitors are in a high quality natural setting that is developed and sometimes heavily used. Overlooks along a paved roadway on the west rim provide visitors a variety of canyon views and offer access to canyon trails. Visitors touring the canyon rim have a sense of being in a natural environment but are not adversely affected by encounters with other visitors. They are informed of the canyon's geologic, hydrologic, biologic and historic/prehistoric significance.

At the mouth of the canyon, visitors are primarily engaging in simple, resource-compatible activities such as wading, sunbathing, picnicking and fishing. Facilities promote and guide use and help to minimize impacts to the environment. Use is consistent with flood safety concerns and protection of floodplain values. Development promotes floodplain values and design standards for roads and other facilities are sufficient to withstand heavy use and occasional flooding.

The attractive setting at the Little River Falls area is developed to allow for traditional heavy recreational use. Safety is a major concern because of the concentration of Preserve visitors, through traffic and also the dangers attendant to use around the falls. As a result, visitors are being informed of opportunities and safety concerns, and use is being carefully guided with visitors using only designated parking, trails and recreational sites. Facility design standards are high to sustain heavy use. Visitors are mostly casually walking on trails and engaging in other simple, passive pursuits. Encounters with other visitors are both frequent and expected, especially during warm weather.

Special Use Unit/Desired Future Visitor Experience

Within the wildlife management area, visitors are in an essentially natural setting engaged in activities varying from simply driving on the primitive roads to walking on the trails, camping, and floating the river; from unstructured nature observation and relaxation to regulated hunting in season. Solitude is easily attained away from the roads and popular gathering places. Several primitive camps are designated. River access points are few, with facilities sufficient to protect resources and withstand flooding. Visitor education is occurring primarily off-site.

The state park contains a natural setting serving as an important visitor facility base. As such, it complements the other areas of the Preserve. The area is sensitively developed and often heavily used. Visitors are learning about the resources and experiences available in other areas of the Preserve as well as in the general area. Overnight accommodations and food service are available. Facility design standards are high to sustain heavy use. Visitor education is occurring on-site.

The Highway 35 corridor serves as a transportation route for through traffic as well as for visitors to the Preserve. The corridor is visually pleasing and blends with the natural setting beyond the right-of-way. Travelers are aware of being in the Preserve and of the likely presence of visitor vehicles entering the corridor.

General Implementation Strategies

A variety of activities, such as hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking, camping, rock climbing, kayaking/canoeing, picnicking and horseback riding, would be accommodated to the extent possible in areas and in such manner that avoids unacceptable resource impacts and user conflicts. Public education efforts concerning resource values and the need to protect these values within the Preserve would be undertaken. Information would be provided on safety precautions and rules of use. Trails to accommodate various users (hikers, backpackers, horseback riders, bicyclists) would be developed using already existing abandoned/closed roads, traces and paths to the extent possible. Roads, trails and overlooks would be repaired/improved, where appropriate, to correct and prevent further resource damage. Cooperation with the appropriate entities would continue concerning road maintenance and with TVA regarding maintenance of and any changes to the power

line right-of-way. Any commercial recreation providers operating in the Preserve would be licensed to conform to NPS requirements. Cooperation would continue with the Alabama Game and Fish Division in managing fishing, hunting and trapping and with DeSoto State Park in offering quality facilities and programs enhancing visitor enjoyment. Studies are still needed before a final decision about possibly widening Alabama Highway 35 from two lanes to four lanes east of Fort Payne. NPS will work closely with the Alabama Department of Transportation on the question to help explore authorities and clarify issues related to the road widening. The existing good relationships with Preserve neighbors and users would continue and be enhanced where possible to ensure open communication leading toward successful management of the Preserve.

Preserve managers would learn more about use patterns and the extent to which crowding occurs that could impact the visitor experience or resources. At this time, only gross estimates can be made concerning visitor capacity of certain areas of the Preserve. For the canyon rim drive and overlooks, a maximum daily vehicle capacity of 1100 is estimated, or 2750 persons, to permit visitors a satisfactory canyon viewing experience. For the Little River Falls area, considering the parking specifically provided, 50 vehicles at one time would be an instant capacity estimate. For the canyon mouth recreation site, 100 vehicles at one time would be maximum capacity. The 5,000 annual large game hunter-days provided by the wildlife management area is considered by the state near capacity, although substantial capacity remains for other types of hunting. The capacity of DeSoto State Park facilities is expected to remain about the same. Surveys to determine visitor satisfaction are planned and would help to make capacity estimates more specific. More extensive resource studies are also needed and planned.

Interpretation/Education

A primary NPS function is to help park visitors and the general public to understand and appreciate the significance of national park system areas. This is key to achieving the Congressionally mandated mission of the NPS to preserve park resources and values for the enjoyment and benefit of the public.

The significance of the Preserve may be stated as:

The nation's longest mountaintop river and one of the southeast's deepest canyons create an awe-inspiring

backdrop for northeast Alabama's Little River Canyon National Preserve. It is a living classroom inhabited by people from prehistoric time to the present. The Preserve is also a geological and biological wonderland. Formed by a river whose waters are among the nation's purest, the canyon's cliffs tower up to 600 feet above the canyon floor and enclose vast biodiversity including an abundance of rare and endangered species. Little River Canyon National Preserve is an extraordinary resource, rich with history and a future that promises conservation, education, and recreation for all.

Therefore, the primary interpretive/educational efforts at the Preserve would focus on:

- Water Quality
- Rare Plants and Animals
- Scenic Grandeur
- Environmental Change/Management

Significant attention would also be devoted to informing visitors about what to see and do in the Preserve and to warning users of safety precautions, especially as they relate to hunting, rockclimbing and whitewater use. The safety messages would be posted on bulletin boards in the Preserve and in bulletins and pamphlets made available through user clubs. Patrolling rangers would also be a key element in contacting visitors about safety considerations.

Some interpretive signs would be developed for the canyon rim road to help visitors better understand and appreciate what they are experiencing.

This plan does not contemplate developing a visitor center inside the Preserve. One promising possibility is the planned Little River Field School, sponsored by Jacksonville State University and the State of Alabama slated to be located adjacent to the Preserve's west boundary off Highway 35. Other alternatives may be possible and include existing facilities at DeSoto State Park, the DeKalb County Tourist Association Welcome Center and the Alabama Welcome Center. These facilities could reasonably serve as possible orientation and education centers to help meet the visitor understanding and appreciation goals of the Preserve.

Regardless of the ultimate venue, the interpretive stories provided would combine a variety of media (exhibits, audiovisual programs) and personal services. Ranger-led tours would be scheduled and conducted inside the Preserve, and outreach programs would also be given to

schools, civic clubs, etc., to promote understanding and appreciation for the resource values and significance of the Preserve.

Preserving Resources

The following resource-specific discussions apply to the entire Preserve. Descriptions of desired future resource conditions are followed by general implementation strategies.

Water Resources

Desired Future Conditions: Little River is recognized as integral to the Preserve. In terms of water quality, it is seen as a rarity among river systems in the region. Its state water quality classification and “Outstanding National Resource Water” designation are being maintained. Little River’s quality, flow and dependent plant and animal species are being managed as elements of critical importance to the Preserve’s purpose and significance. Management for resource protection is proactive, with efforts made to improve conditions where practical. The forested plateau is recognized for its ecological relationship with and contribution to the quality of the Preserve’s riverine resources. Land and water uses in the greater Little River watershed support these conditions and generally promote a sustainable and productive environment.

General Implementation Strategies: The quality and quantity of water resources are fundamental, complex and highly dynamic resource management issues for the Preserve. The most prominent water resource of the Preserve is Little River, including portions of its east and west forks. Less prominent are the numerous tributaries, all of which contribute to Little River’s quality and quantity.

Water quality monitoring efforts would continue. NPS would cooperate with established federal, state and local water resource protection programs and with local communities and neighbors in efforts to assure that water quality and related values are protected in the Preserve.

Sufficient erosion control measures would be included in all NPS development projects to protect water quality and meet all State and local requirements.

Fish, Wildlife and Other Ecological Resources

Desired Future Conditions: Threatened, endangered and other species of concern and their habitats are identified and protected, and habitat restoration projects are underway. The ecological requirements of all other fish and wildlife within the Preserve are recognized and sustained. Terrestrial and wetland ecology is of high quality. Floodplain values are protected. The populations and effects of exotic and pest species are being minimized.

General Implementation Strategies: While a number of valuable resource inventories have been conducted, supplemental work is necessary. Sufficient data are needed to adequately understand and protect biological diversity within the Preserve. A coordinated program would be established to gather baseline data on, monitor and manage rare, threatened and endangered species, critical habitats, indigenous and exotic species. The Alabama Game and Fish Division and the NPS would cooperatively administer hunting, fishing and trapping consistent with state and federal laws and regulations and Preserve legislation. Fire management would be used to benefit certain endangered species, improve habitat and reduce fuels.

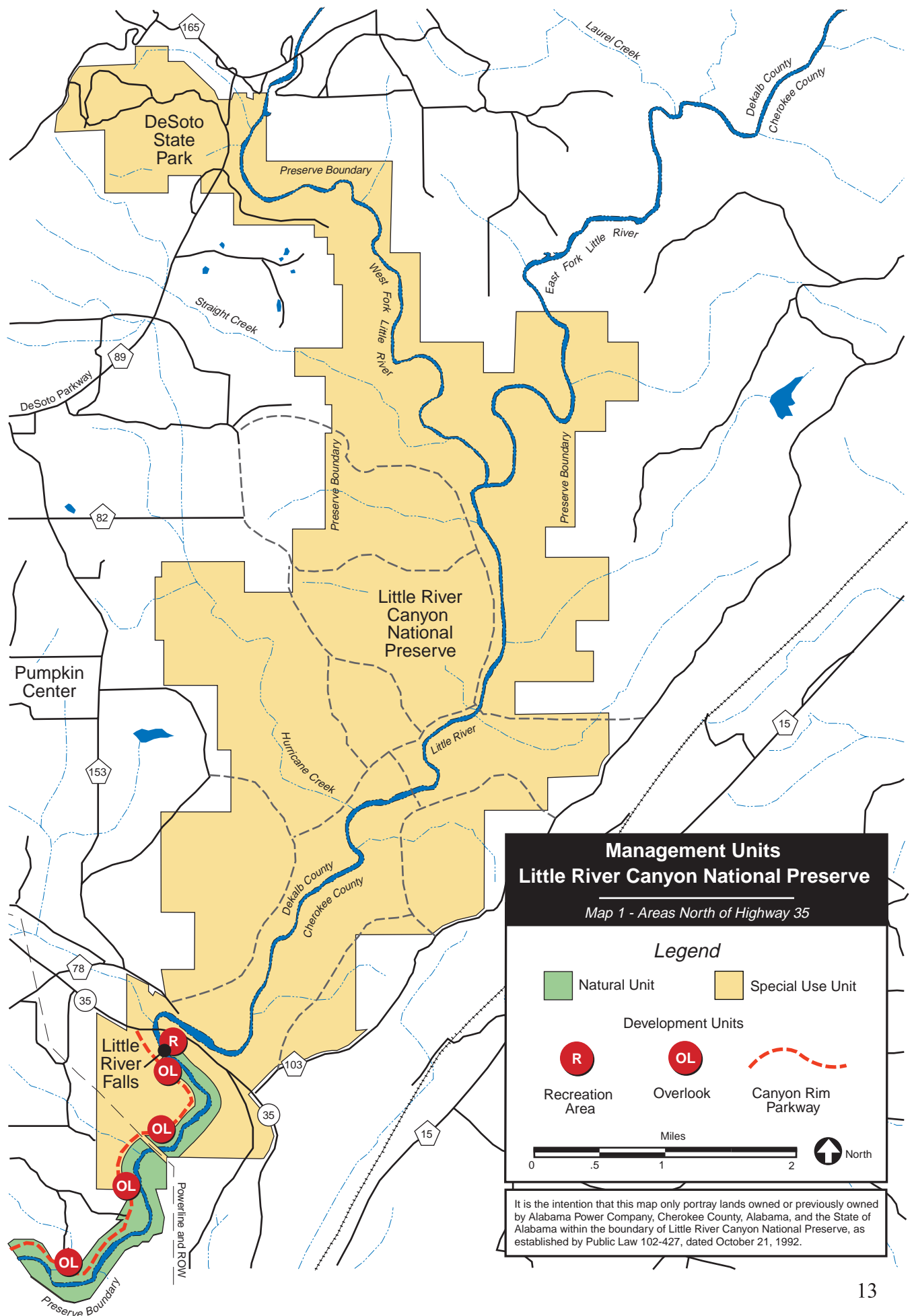
Cultural Resources

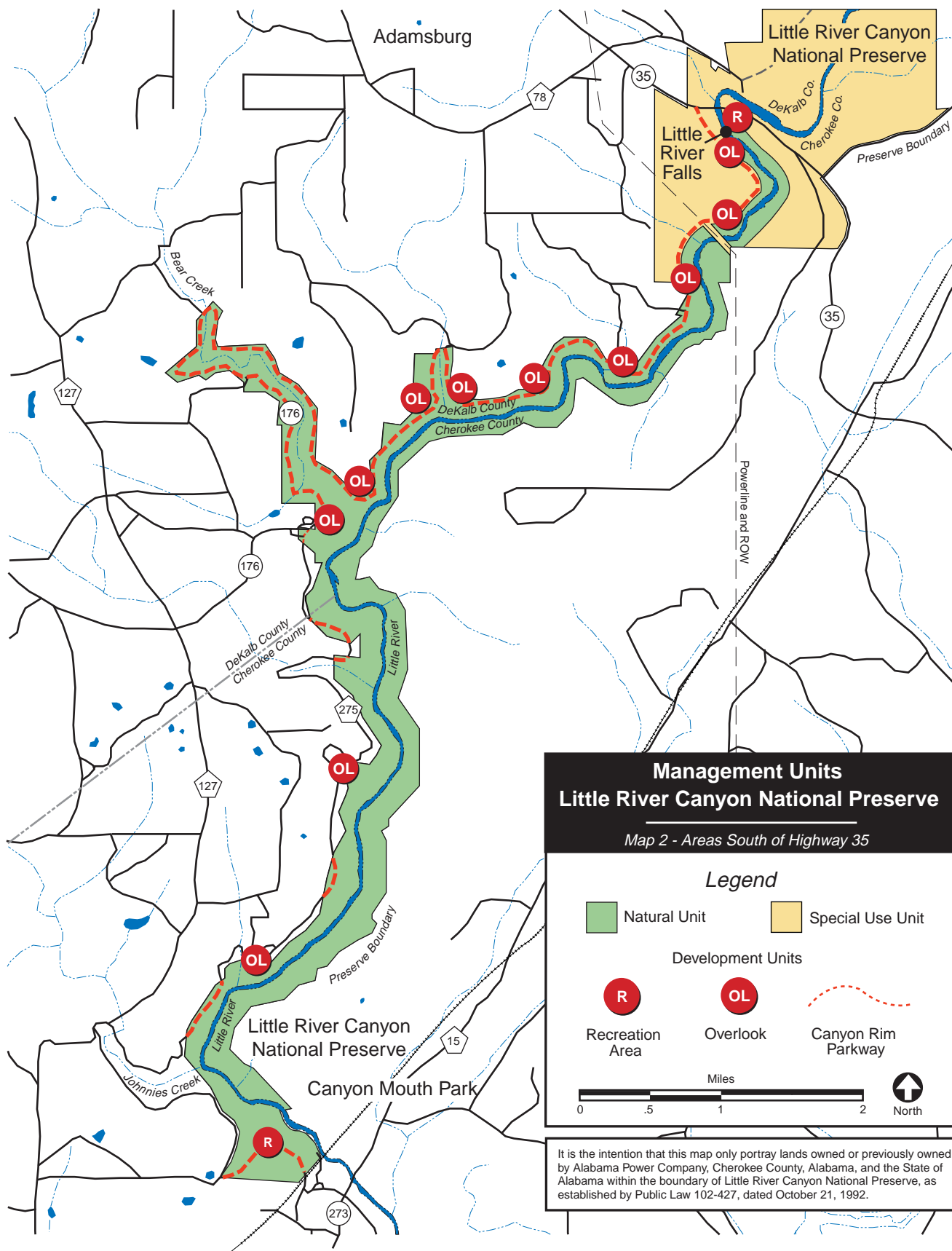
Desired Future Conditions: The archeological and historical record of human occupation is identified and is being preserved. Ethnographic resources are identified and appropriately reflected in Preserve management.

General Implementation Strategies: A program would be established to collect baseline data on cultural resources. Identified resources would be evaluated for National Register of Historic Places eligibility. NPS would consult with the Alabama State Historic Preservation Officer. Efforts would be made to continue the compilation of oral histories which would be incorporated into interpretation and management of the Preserve.

Preserve Development

Significant additional development is not contemplated. However, because the Preserve is newly established, adjustments to present visitor use sites or new sites could be warranted in the future. The desired future visitor experience and resource conditions would remain





valid and guide any changes to presently anticipated development.

The Preserve's headquarters/administrative office and ranger station would continue in leased facilities outside the Preserve. A small maintenance facility is being considered; otherwise, this function would continue to be housed in leased space.

The Preserve would continue to maintain its 20 miles of primitive roads using available funding sources. The Preserve would also be responsible for maintaining the canyon mouth development site, trails, overlooks along the canyon rim road and the parking area and related facilities at Little River Falls.

The following rehabilitation and development projects are included in the proposal, and funds are already available.

- Improve 4 miles of trails. These trails are badly eroded and blocked in many places by fallen trees and flood debris. For access and safety, these trails need work.
- Provide maintenance facility. A fully adequate facility does not exist for equipment/supplies storage to support the maintenance function.
- Provide interpretive waysides and shelters at 10 sites. The public needs to be made aware of safety hazards such as high water/flooding, high cliffs, hypothermia and poisonous animals and plants.

Preserve Operations and Staffing

To fully carry out the proposed resource stewardship and visitor use strategies would require additional staffing of:

- 1-2 full-time Protection Rangers
- 3-4 seasonal Park Guides
- 2 subject-to-furlough Resource Management Technicians
- 2 seasonal Maintenance Workers

To support these additional employees would require a maximum of \$365,000 added to the Preserve's operating base. The Preserve would pursue the needed funding through the normal budget process. Other strategies that would be pursued include use of volunteers and

partnership agreements as well as stretching existing funding to the greatest extent possible. Adoption of the proposed management goals, or "desired future conditions," would not be dependent on additional staffing; however, attainment of those conditions would be hindered.

CONTINUATION OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

This alternative is considered to meet NEPA requirements. The purpose of considering a "no action" alternative is to provide a comparison with the proposal. Management of the Preserve under this alternative would generally mean NPS would not take any significant administrative actions to achieve identified desired future conditions. This alternative does include any projects currently being implemented, actions required by law, minor safety projects that may become necessary and periodic maintenance of existing facilities. The Preserve's existing conditions are more fully described in the section, "The Affected Preserve Environment."

Resource Management

Water Resources

To the extent possible with available staff and through arrangements with others, monitoring of water quality in Little River would occur in support of state designations. Erosion control measures would be included in any ground disturbing activity within the Preserve. State and local regulations would be met.

Fish, Wildlife, and Other Ecological Resources

Attempts would be made to fulfill all required actions to protect and enhance endangered, threatened and other species of concern including their critical habitat. Data collection would be less than that necessary to support best management. Cooperation with the Alabama Division of Game and Fish would continue. Few steps would be taken to facilitate restoration of natural systems.

Cultural Resources

Inventory and evaluation of significance would occur sporadically on an as-needed basis. Systematic data collection and monitoring would occur as possible but would likely be minimal.

Visitor Use and Development

No actions would be taken to change the general patterns of use within the Preserve. Other than receiving periodic maintenance, existing public facilities, trails, and traditional use sites would remain in their existing condition. No additional development would occur. Interpretive and information signs would continue to be generally lacking.

Preserve Operations

The Preserve headquarters and related offices would remain in leased space outside the Preserve. Existing arrangements with others would continue concerning road maintenance. Cooperation would continue with the State concerning the wildlife management area and DeSoto State Park.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The following alternatives were identified but were not evaluated in detail.

The Preserve as a Primitive Area.

In this alternative, the wildlife management area and the canyon would be managed as a roadless area with no motorized vehicles allowed. Trails would be the only type of development provided.

There are no roads in Little River Canyon itself, and none are contemplated under any alternative. However, closing and abandoning roads in the wildlife management area would be a part of this alternative.

The dirt roads that crisscross the Preserve's wildlife management area now afford access for a variety of recreation pursuits--hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, swimming and paddling. These activities are consistent with the purpose of the Preserve as stated in its establishing legislation, and they are compatible with Preserve resources. Closing these roads would greatly reduce, if not preclude, opportunities to engage in such pursuits at the Preserve, because the remainder of the Preserve--the canyon itself--is almost totally inaccessible to any but experienced whitewater paddlers and rockclimbers.

The system of roads within the wildlife management area totals about 18 miles and in surface area (figuring a road width of about 14 feet) makes up less than one-half of one percent of the 8,500 acres of this area of the

Preserve. NPS has worked these roads in recent months to control erosion and avoid significant siltation into the river and tributaries. Thus, closing and abandoning the roads would not mean any appreciable improvement in water quality in the area. The roads can and do serve as barriers to the spread of fires. Since fire needs to be used in this area as a management tool for endangered species preservation, wildlife habitat improvement and fuel reduction to avoid possible catastrophic fires, closing and abandoning these roads would foreclose some needed resource management/protection options.

Because the roads are such a very small percentage of the total Preserve, because closing the roads would hinder the resource management function of the Preserve and because the roads afford opportunities for a variety of suitable recreation pursuits that are not possible elsewhere in the Preserve, this alternative was dropped.

Little River as a National Wild & Scenic River

This designation was considered in the Special Resource Study prepared for Congress prior to designation of the Preserve. Even though eligible and suitable, Congress chose the National Preserve option which set aside a larger area than normally allowed by Wild & Scenic River legislation. Congress specifically included reference to section 7(a) of the Wild & Scenic Rivers Act to afford the segment of Little River in the Preserve the same protection afforded rivers in the national wild & scenic river system. By virtue of its being a unit of the national park system and the application of section 7(a) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, Little River within the Preserve has the protection of a Wild and Scenic River.

SUMMARY COMPARISON OF THE PROPOSAL AND "NO ACTION" ALTERNATIVE

Planning Objectives

- Proposal: Identifies specific management goals (desired future conditions) and strategies to implement the intent of Congress as expressed in the legislation establishing the Preserve and NPS policy; satisfies or provides guidance for planning issues.
- "No Action": Continue without a Preserve-wide definition of goals and strategies, contrary to

Congressional intent and NPS policy; planning issues partially addressed.

Resource Management

- Proposal: “Desired future conditions” provide management goals; conduct studies and inventories; monitor; reduce impacting uses; rehabilitate disturbed areas; maintain/develop cooperative management programs with partner agencies; the Preserve’s Resource Management Plan would be updated to reflect the strategies included in the Proposal.
- “No Action”: The Preserve’s Resource Management Plan contains many of the elements of the Proposal but is not structured to achieve identified desired future conditions.

Visitor Use and Development

- Proposal: “Desired future conditions” provide management goals; conduct surveys; reduce conflicts and safety hazards; improved facilities; extensive visitor education and interpretation of resources; maintain/develop cooperative programs with partners and neighbors.
- “No Action”: No formal comprehensive approach to visitor management; incremental improvements to some areas/facilities.

Preserve Operations

- Proposal: A possible new maintenance facility within Preserve; continued leased space for other operations; increased staff as funding permits; otherwise, utilize partnerships.
- “No Action”: Continued leased space; existing conditions.

Implementation

- Proposal: Implementation as funding allows; estimated annual operations cost—\$1,115,000.
- “No Action”: No additional development; estimated annual operations cost—\$750,000. (This approximates the Preserve’s existing budget.)

Impacts on Water Resources

- Proposal: Long term maintenance of quality and quantity through adoption of comprehensive management goals and strategies.
- “No Action”: Protection on an issue-specific basis and with increasing difficulty without comprehensive goals and strategies.



Dry-stacked stone wall marks location of an old farm

Impacts on Fish, Wildlife, and Vegetation

- Proposal: Ecosystem enhancement through coordinated strategies; protection of species of concern; reduction of losses due to higher degree of visitor use management and rehabilitation of unauthorized use sites.
- “No Action”: Continued losses due to unauthorized uses and insufficient enforcement.

Impacts on Cultural Resources

- Proposal: Preservation enhanced through formal management strategies and the monitoring of construction activities.
- “No Action”: Continued losses due to unauthorized uses and insufficient enforcement.

Impacts on Visitor Experience

- Proposal: Enhancement of the experience through adoption of formal strategies, facility

improvement, increased protection and interpretation of resources, increased accessibility, reduced safety hazards and user conflicts; use patterns would be managed to achieve desired conditions; total use would increase; greater visitor satisfaction.

- “No Action”: Gradual deterioration of visitor satisfaction; total use would not increase as much as under the proposal.

Impacts on the Community

- Proposal: Beneficial, long-term tourism impact; increased rate of land use change; minor benefit to area businesses from facility construction activity.
- “No Action” Alternative: Beneficial tourism impact but not as much as the proposal; not as much impact on rate of land use change; less benefit to local businesses.



Chapter Four

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The following discussion is intended to provide an analysis of the effects reasonably expected if the proposal for the Preserve is adopted. An analysis of the “No Action” alternative is also included for comparison.

IMPACT TOPICS

The following components of the human environment are evaluated.

- Water Resources
- Fish, Wildlife and Vegetation
- Cultural Resources
- Visitor Experience
- Local Area and Facilities

No additional topics were suggested for specific analysis during the planning process. The NPS would comply with all relevant laws, regulations and policies, a number of which are discussed immediately following the impact analysis.

ANALYSIS OF IMPACTS

The Proposal

With the implementation of the management strategies outlined in the description of the proposal, the attainment of the identified desired future conditions may be anticipated. The desired future conditions by themselves indicate the positive results, or impacts, that could be expected.

Because of the proposed management unit framework, the management strategies are applied on a unit-wide basis and are not site-specific. This does not allow for a detailed analysis of impacts. Therefore, the information that follows identifies those potential impacts to the extent they can be anticipated. More detailed compliance analysis would be conducted when a specific action is being considered for implementation. This analysis would include surveys—with appropriate consultation—to identify important plant and animal species and habitats, wetlands, floodplains, important soils, scenic

values and archeological, historical and ethnographic resources.

Water Resources

The thrust of the proposal is to better equip NPS to properly maintain the high quality of Preserve waters. Proposed management strategies call for completing inventories, plans and reports, as well as monitoring, to provide the needed basis for appropriate management of both quality and quantity. Any possible water quality influences would be identified, and steps would be taken using available local, state and/or federal authorities to mitigate any threats. From both a water quality standpoint and to protect aquatic species (some of which are endangered or threatened), the streamflow in Little River is important. While high and low water are largely influenced by natural events (rainfall and drought), the Preserve would work closely with local, state and federal programs in efforts to assure that human-caused decreases or increases in Little River streamflow do not adversely affect water quality and/or aquatic resources.

The only anticipated physical changes that may occur that could affect water quality would be related to ground disturbing activity during the work of rehabilitation, where needed, on existing visitor use sites that occur near the river or tributary streams. The potential exists for minor short-term erosion, sedimentation and resultant increases in stream turbidity. Erosion and sedimentation controls would be employed in accordance with federal and state regulations and NPS policies in order to minimize these effects and maintain the high water quality standards. Therefore, the potential effect of such changes would be minor. No new use sites are proposed on or near the river that would affect previously undisturbed areas. Any development would be subject to stringent water quality protection measures.

Control and proper disposal of solid and human waste would be addressed by increased maintenance, greater visitor education and monitoring and appropriate

enforcement. This is currently not a problem, and is not anticipated to become one.

Fish, Wildlife and Vegetation

Having a basis for appropriate management is the expected output from the proposal. Enhanced conditions for aquatic and terrestrial ecological resources would be the result.

To the extent that development would be considered appropriate in the future, previously used and disturbed sites would be given first consideration. When new sites are considered necessary, sites would be selected that would avoid important species and habitat and would minimize effects on the natural environment.

Wildlife in any new development areas would be temporarily disturbed by equipment and personnel. Some mortality of resident individuals could occur, although this should not affect populations.

Soils in any new development sites would be compacted where necessary for specific facilities. Any necessary grading would destroy soil structure. Rehabilitation of impacted areas would occur.

Some of the proposed rehabilitation work would occur within 100-year floodplains, such as river access sites and trails. These would be compatible with floodplain values.

New rock climbing routes would have potential for impacting resources by any new approach trails or parking areas or by use of the routes themselves. This would be minimized through prior approvals based on resource analysis and avoidance of sensitive areas and sustainable design of necessary trails. No significant impact is anticipated.

Any improvements to the canyon rim drive would likely be within the existing road prism, i.e., within existing disturbed area. To the extent new, undisturbed area is involved, specific analysis of impacts would occur and mitigation measures would be identified. Small areas of roadside vegetation could be affected. Improvements to overlook areas would be treated in like manner.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Alabama Natural Heritage Program would advise on any activity that could affect any species of concern, including avoidance, enhancement or mitigation. The Fish and Wildlife Service and the Corps of Engineers would

advise on effects on wetlands and floodplains. Proposed visitor uses including hunting, trapping and fishing are not expected to affect any endangered or threatened plants or animals. The endangered green pitcher plant occurs in eight or nine seepage bogs in the Preserve, and these recreation pursuits which have occurred historically in the area have not been detrimental to the plant. They have not been trampled by hunters or trappers. In fact, no significant hunting or trapping activity goes on in the plant's habitat. This is also true of other endangered and threatened plants in the Preserve. The only known animal species federally listed as endangered or threatened and occurring in the Preserve are freshwater mussels and the blue shiner. The blue shiner is a small fish that is not taken by sport fishermen. Likewise, the threat to freshwater mussels and the one endangered aquatic plant (Kral's water-plantain) in the Preserve is not fisherman, hunters or trappers. The reasons for rarity stem from water quality changes and streambed modifications throughout these species' historic range. Such threats, although possible, are not likely to occur in the Preserve given NPS efforts to inventory and monitor populations and avoid the populations in any anticipated development.

Combined with the efforts of others, the proposed strategies would have a cumulative effect of enhancing ecological resources.

Cultural Resources

The proposed inventorying and monitoring would benefit cultural resources by providing a sound basis for management. More effective protection and preservation would be the result.

Possible impacts of rehabilitation or any development activity include disturbance of unknown archeological resources. With prior surveys, this would be minimized, but because of the potential, any development activity would be monitored and would be halted if such resources were uncovered. The State Historic Preservation Officer would be consulted.

In combination with the preservation efforts in the area by the state, the cumulative effect on cultural resource protection is positive.

Visitor Experience

All uses of the Preserve would be managed to achieve desired future conditions. Proposed facility improvement and resource enhancement would contribute positively to the visitor experience. Periodic

surveys would be used to monitor visitor satisfaction. Some individuals may not appreciate Preserve goals and related management efforts.

When combined with the efforts of the Alabama State Park and Game and Fish Divisions inside the Preserve boundary, as well as others within the local area, the proposed strategies would have a beneficial cumulative effect on the visitor experience, and total visitor use would increase.

Local Area and Facilities

The proposal would have a fairly substantial, long-term beneficial effect on the surrounding local area by enhancing the Preserve's potential to contribute to the area's general attractiveness. Lookout Mountain has been popular for years, and the added attraction of an NPS-administered area should add to the popularity.

The limited amount of development work within the Preserve would have a small beneficial effect on local businesses and suppliers. It is expected that most materials and labor to accomplish the rehabilitation/development would come from the local area.

The number of visitors to the Preserve from outside the surrounding region is believed to be slowly increasing as the Preserve becomes more known. This would occur under either alternative since establishment was quite recent. However, the proposal would be expected to increase the attractiveness of the Preserve and therefore the number of new and return visitors. As a result, visitor expenditures in the surrounding area would likely be greater with the proposal. Land use planning and management by DeKalb and Cherokee Counties could be warranted in the future to guide expected growth and to maintain the beauty and quality of the general area.

Land use in the vicinity of the Preserve would likely continue to change in response to demand for home sites and recreational activities and services on Lookout Mountain. The rate of this change would likely be slightly greater than under the "no action" alternative because of the enhanced attraction of the Preserve under the proposal.

When combined with existing trends and the activities of others, the proposal would have a positive, although not major, cumulative impact on the local area and facilities.

"No Action" Alternative

By definition, the "no action" alternative means there would be no increased effort to manage either the resources or the uses of the Preserve. The previously identified desired future conditions would not be adopted as management goals. This would result in a general continuation of existing conditions. The following impacts would be anticipated.

Water Resources

Some erosion and resulting sedimentation would continue from informal recreation sites near the river and its tributaries. Significant impacts would not be expected in the short term as these uses have continued for years. However, as use increases, conditions could become problematic on a cumulative basis as these sites become further degraded and additional sites are impacted.

Fish, Wildlife and Vegetation

Continued and increasing visitor use of informal recreation sites and the river would be expected to incidentally disturb additional vegetated areas and habitat. The impact from one site would likely not be significant, but the cumulative impact from numerous sites would likely begin to have long term effects that may become significant. Impacts on species of special concern and critical habitat would not be necessarily anticipated.

Cultural Resources

Visitor use of informal, unofficial sites and trails would likely result in impacts on archeological resources either through intentional relic hunting or unintentional physical disturbance. Any disturbance of currently unsurveyed resources may be significant and irreversible. The potential for significant cumulative adverse impacts is high.

Visitor Experience

Visitor use would continue to increase although not as much as under the proposal. The general patterns of use within the Preserve would likely remain unchanged. Short-term impacts would be negligible. However, with increasing visitation and pressures to accommodate visitors at popular sites, the quality of the visitor experience would likely deteriorate over the long term. User conflicts and safety concerns could be expected to increase. There would be a general absence of resource

interpretation, resulting in less than desirable understanding and appreciation of the resources.

Local Area and Facilities

An increasing number of visitors would likely have a minor beneficial effect on the local economy over the long term through purchases of goods and services.

Land use in the vicinity of the Preserve would continue to change in response to demand for home sites and recreational activities and services atop Lookout Mountain. The rate of this change may be enhanced slightly by the existence of the Preserve.

COMPLIANCE WITH SPECIFIC LAWS AND REGULATIONS

- National Environmental Policy Act: This planning document includes an environmental analysis of the alternatives to determine if any anticipated actions by the NPS would have a significant impact on the quality of the environment. The present analysis does not indicate that this would be the case. Important benefits are expected to accrue to resources within the Preserve, and at the same time, minor short-term impacts would be expected at specific sites where new areas may be disturbed for facility development or rehabilitation. Since this analysis was conducted on an area-wide or management unit basis, site-specific impacts were unable to be addressed. Therefore, compliance under this act must be further addressed when specific elements of the approved alternative are to be implemented.
- Federal Water Pollution Control Act, as amended, 1987 Federal Water Quality Act, and Alabama Water Pollution Control Act, as amended: Any NPS development activity and operations that would have potential for affecting water quality must comply with these laws and applicable regulations. Careful siting of ground disturbing activities would minimize this potential and would include all appropriate erosion and sedimentation control measures to maintain mandated water quality.
- Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended: Section 7 requires Federal agencies to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to ensure that actions do not jeopardize the continued existence of listed species or critical habitat. Consultations with the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Alabama Natural Heritage Program have identified numerous species as listed herein. Any development activities would undergo specific analysis and consultation. As a matter of policy, NPS would continue to consult with State program officials on species of State concern.
- Clean Air Act, as amended: The Preserve is classified as a class II clean air area. Maximum allowable increases of sulfur dioxide, particulate matter, and nitrogen oxides beyond baseline concentrations established for class II areas cannot be exceeded. Implementation of either alternative would not significantly affect air quality in the area.
- Antiquities Act of 1906, National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, and Executive Order 11593 "Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment": The protection and preservation of cultural resources by NPS are mandated by these authorities. Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer is included in all activities that identify, preserve, impact, or otherwise affect cultural resources.
- American Indian Religious Freedom Act: This act requires consulting Indian tribes having traditional associations with the Preserve.
- Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990: In keeping with the intent of these acts, facilities and programs would be accessible to disabled visitors where possible.
- Prime and Unique Farmland Protection Policy: Prime and unique farmlands in the Preserve area are linked with two soil associations: Hartsells-Rock Outcrop and Hartsells-Linker-Hector. Generally, these associations can be found around drainage heads, in shallow depressions, at the base of slopes, and on colluvial and alluvial fans. Other possible areas include floodplains, gently sloping ridge tops, and sandstone plateaus. In order to minimize effects on farmland of special concern, NPS would consult with the Natural Resource Conservation Service to ensure

compatibility of any development work in previously undisturbed areas.

- Executive Order 12898, “Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations”: Federal agencies are required to evaluate any effects of their actions on minority or low-income populations. The actions identified in the alternatives for Preserve management would have no known direct or indirect effects on these populations.
- Executive Order 11988, “Floodplain Management,” and Executive Order 11990, “Protection of Wetlands”: The protection of floodplain and wetland values is mandated by these orders. Development of some facilities would be located within the 100-year floodplain. However, the intent of these facilities is to provide simple and appropriate access to the river. These are compatible floodplain uses that are excepted from compliance. Because of careful siting of any new facilities, and because of site options within the management units, no impacts on wetlands are anticipated; however, when specific facilities are to be developed, further analysis of potential impacts to wetlands would be conducted. If appropriate, a statement of findings would be prepared and accompany the environmental compliance document.
- Executive Order 11987, “Exotic Organisms”: Federal agencies are required to restrict introduction of exotic species into natural ecosystems on lands and in waters they administer and to encourage states, local governments and others to prevent introduction into the country’s natural ecosystems. Resource management strategies to achieve the desired future conditions would comply with this order.

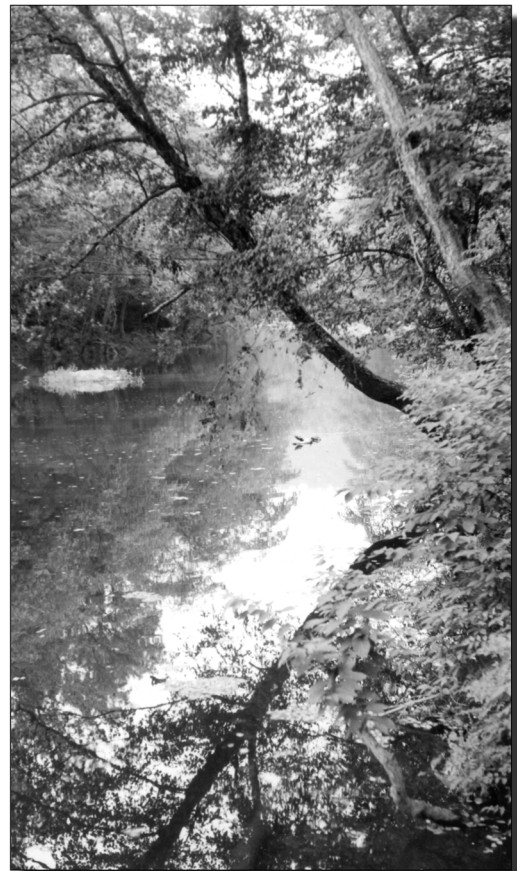
SUSTAINABILITY AND LONG-TERM MANAGEMENT

Relationship between local short-term uses of the environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity: The rehabilitation and possible minor new development actions proposed would essentially be a continuation of resource uses that have existed for many years. In the context of the Preserve

area, the affected lands would represent an extremely small percent. Coupled with proposed resource management strategies, this would indicate resource productivity of the Preserve would be maintained and enhanced. Under the No-Action Alternative, long-term resource enhancement would be slightly less.

Irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources: Continued use of existing developed facilities and areas would represent a permanent commitment of resources. Anywhere that any new development occurs would constitute additional resource commitments. There is no significant difference between alternatives.

Adverse impacts that cannot be avoided should the alternative be implemented: Significant adverse impacts are not anticipated under the proposal. The possibility exists for significant losses of archeological resources under the No-Action Alternative.



A quiet pool on the river



View from canyon overlook



Appendix A

LEGISLATION

PUBLIC LAW 102-427—OCT. 21, 1992

106 STAT. 21'

Public Law 102-427
102d Congress

An Act

To establish the Little River Canyon National Preserve in the State of Alabama.

Oct. 21, 1992
[H.R. 3665]

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

Conservation.

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

16 USC 698q
note.

This Act may be cited as the "Little River Canyon National Preserve Act of 1992".

SEC. 2. ESTABLISHMENT.

16 USC 698q.

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—In order to protect and preserve the natural, scenic, recreational, and cultural resources of the Little River Canyon area in DeKalb and Cherokee Counties, Alabama, and to provide for the protection and public enjoyment of the resources, there is established the Little River Canyon National Preserve (referred to in this Act as the "Preserve").

(b) **AREA INCLUDED.**—The Preserve shall consist of the lands, waters, and interests in lands and waters generally depicted on the boundary map entitled "Little River Canyon National Preserve", numbered NA-LRNP-80,001C, and dated March 1992.

(c) **MAP.**—The map referred to in subsection (b) shall—

(1) be on file and available for public inspection in the offices of the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior in Washington, District of Columbia; and

(2) be filed with the appropriate offices of DeKalb and Cherokee Counties in the State of Alabama.

(d) **PUBLICATION OF DESCRIPTION.**—Not later than 6 months after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the Interior (referred to in this Act as the "Secretary") shall publish in the Federal Register a detailed description of the boundaries of the Preserve.

SEC. 3. ADMINISTRATION.

16 USC 698r.

(a) **IN GENERAL.**—The Preserve shall be administered by the Secretary in accordance with this Act and in accordance with the laws generally applicable to units of the National Park System, including—

(1) the Act entitled "An Act to establish a National Park Service, and for other purposes", approved August 25, 1916 (16 U.S.C. 1 et seq.); and

(2) the Act entitled "An Act to provide for the preservation of historic American sites, buildings, objects, and antiquities of national significance, and for other purposes", approved August 21, 1935 (16 U.S.C. 461 et seq.).

(b) **HUNTING AND FISHING.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—Subject to paragraphs (2) and (3), the Secretary shall permit hunting, trapping, and fishing on lands and waters under the jurisdiction of the Secretary within the Preserve in accordance with applicable Federal and State laws.

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(2) **TIME AND PLACE RESTRICTIONS.**—Subject to such terms and conditions as the Secretary considers necessary in furtherance of this Act, and after consultation with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources of the State of Alabama and owners of lands adjacent to the Preserve, the Secretary may designate zones where, and establish periods when, the activities described in paragraph (1) will not be permitted within the Preserve for reasons of public safety, administration, fish and wildlife habitat, or public use and enjoyment.

(3) **RESTRICTIONS IN BOUNDARY AREAS.**—After consultation with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources of the State of Alabama and with the owners of lands adjacent to the Preserve, the Secretary may restrict hunting in areas within the Preserve that are adjacent to the boundaries of the Preserve where the restriction is necessary or appropriate to protect public safety.

(4) **CONGRESSIONAL INTENT.**—Nothing in this Act is intended to affect the jurisdiction or responsibilities of the State of Alabama with respect to fish and wildlife.

(c) **WATER RESOURCES PROJECTS.**—Subsection (a) of section 7 of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (16 U.S.C. 1278(a)) shall apply to that portion of the Little River that flows through the Preserve in the same manner and to the same extent as such subsection applies to the rivers referred to in such subsection. The application of such subsection to the Preserve shall not affect any determination of the value of the lands, waters, or interests in lands and waters within the boundaries of the Preserve.

(d) **COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH STATE.**—

(1) **LAW ENFORCEMENT AND FIRE PREVENTION.**—In administering the Preserve, the Secretary may enter into cooperative agreements with the State of Alabama, or any political subdivision of the State, for the rendering of—

(A) rescue, fire fighting, and law enforcement services; and

(B) cooperative assistance by law enforcement and fire preventive agencies located in the vicinity of the Preserve.

(2) **PREPARATION OF MANAGEMENT PLAN.**—To facilitate the purposes of this section, the Secretary may enter into cooperative agreements with the State of Alabama and directly affected political subdivisions of the State to provide professional assistance in the preparation of the management plan for the Preserve.

Contracts.

(e) **DESOTO STATE PARK.**—If lands within DeSoto State Park are acquired by the Secretary, at the request of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources of the State of Alabama, the Secretary shall enter into a cooperative agreement with the Department for the continued management by the Department of the lodge and other facilities that, as of the date of enactment of this Act, are part of DeSoto State Park. The cooperative agreement shall provide for the management and operation of the lodge and facilities in a manner that, to the maximum extent practicable, is consistent with similar operations elsewhere in the National Park System.

(f) **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT.**—

(1) **PUBLIC AWARENESS AND PARTICIPATION PROGRAM.**—The Secretary shall develop and conduct a program to promote and encourage awareness of and participation in the develop-

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ment of the general management plan for the Preserve by persons owning property in the vicinity of the Preserve, other interested groups and individuals, State, county, and municipal agencies, and the general public. Prior to final approval of the plan, the Secretary shall hold public meetings in DeKalb and Cherokee Counties.

(2) **CONSIDERATION OF PUBLIC COMMENT.**—In preparing and implementing the plan described in paragraph (1), the Secretary shall give full consideration to the views and comments of the individuals, groups, and agencies described in paragraph (1).

(g) **GREEN PITCHER PLANT.**—Upon the transfer by Alabama Power Company to the United States of any lands within the boundaries of the Preserve that contain the Green Pitcher Plant (*Sarracenia oreophila*), all rights and obligations of Alabama Power Company under the agreement entered into between the company and the Department of the Interior (including the United States Fish and Wildlife Service) on May 12, 1983, in settlement of the action brought on September 24, 1980, against the Secretary and the Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Alabama (Civil Action No. CV 80-C-1242-M), shall be extinguished.

SEC. 4. ACQUISITION.

16 USC 698a.

(a) **AUTHORIZATION.**—

(1) **IN GENERAL.**—Subject to paragraphs (2) and (3), the Secretary is authorized to acquire lands, waters, and interests in lands and waters within the boundaries of the Preserve by donation, purchase with donated or appropriated funds, or exchange.

(2) **CONSENT OF THE OWNER.**—The Secretary may not acquire lands, waters, or interests in lands and waters for the Preserve without the consent of the owner.

(3) **STATE LANDS.**—Lands, waters, and interests in lands and waters within the boundaries of the Preserve that are owned by the State of Alabama, or any political subdivision of the State, may be acquired only by donation or exchange.

(b) **NEGOTIATIONS FOR ACQUISITION.**—

(1) **COMMENCEMENT OF NEGOTIATIONS.**—Immediately after publication of a description of the boundaries of the Preserve in accordance with section 2(d), the Secretary shall commence negotiations for the acquisition of the lands, waters, and interests in lands and waters within the boundaries of the Preserve.

(2) **REPORT TO CONGRESS.**—Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit, in writing, a detailed schedule of actions and a progress report regarding the acquisition to—

(A) the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate;

(B) the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs of the House of Representatives; and

(C) the Committees on Appropriations of Congress.

(3) **ACQUISITION DEADLINE.**—The Secretary shall substantially complete the acquisition of the lands, waters, and interests in lands and waters within the Preserve, in accordance with the purposes of this Act, not later than 2 years after

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the date of enactment of this Act, subject to the availability of funds.

(c) ENVIRONMENTAL AUDITS.—

(1) AVAILABILITY TO OWNER.—Promptly following completion of any environmental audit performed by or on behalf of the Secretary with respect to any property proposed to be acquired for the purposes of this Act, the Secretary shall make available to the owner of the property a copy of the audit.

(2) INCLUSION IN DOCUMENTS TRANSFERRING TITLE.—Any audit described in paragraph (1), and any environmental audit performed by the owner of the property and submitted to the Secretary prior to the date of the acquisition, shall be included as part of the documents transferring title to the property to the United States.

(d) FUTURE ADDITIONS.—No lands or interest in lands may be added to the Preserve after the date of enactment of this Act without specific authorization by Congress and the consent of the owner of the lands or interest.

16 USC 698t.

SEC. 5. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.

There are authorized to be appropriated such sums as are necessary to carry out this Act.

Approved October 21, 1992.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY—H.R. 3665:

HOUSE REPORTS: No. 102-482 (Comm. on Interior and Insular Affairs).

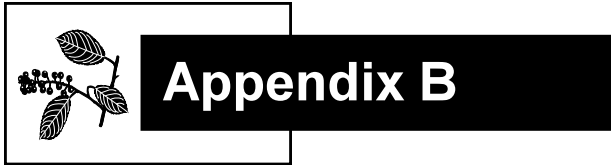
SENATE REPORTS: No. 102-472 (Comm. on Energy and Natural Resources).

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Vol. 138 (1992):

Apr. 7, considered and passed House.

Oct. 1, considered and passed Senate, amended.

Oct. 3, House concurred in Senate amendment.



PREPARERS AND CONTRIBUTORS

National Park Service Planning Team

Steve Bakaletz, Natural Resource Specialist, Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area
Larry Bean, Cultural Resource Specialist, Little River Canyon National Preserve
Dwight Dixon, Chief Ranger, Little River Canyon National Preserve
John Fischer, Job Captain/Park Planner, Southeast Support Office
Don Forester, former Superintendent, Little River Canyon National Preserve
Megan Greiner, former Natural Resource Specialist, Southeast Support Office
Larry Hultquist, Landscape Architect, Southeast Support Office
Ruthanne Mitchell, former Chief, Resources Management, Little River Canyon National Preserve
Farrell Saunders, former Superintendent, Little River Canyon National Preserve
Jim Small, Chief of Operations, Andrew Johnson National Historic Site
Bill Springer, Superintendent, Little River Canyon National Preserve

Contributors

Many individuals contributed to the planning effort. Whether from within an agency, organization, or the general public, all comments received were valuable contributions to the analysis. Special acknowledgement, however, is made of the contributions of two State of Alabama employees:

Talmadge Butler, Superintendent, DeSoto State Park
Bill Coggins, Supervisory Wildlife Biologist, Alabama Game and Fish Division.



Appendix C

REFERENCES/CONSULTATION

Information used to prepare this report was gathered from a variety of sources including:

- Documents previously prepared by NPS that summarize available information,
- Consultations by planning team members with persons in agencies, organizations, and the general public, either in person or by correspondence,
- Public comments, and
- Personal observations by the planning team.

The following NPS documents provided basic information:

- *Special Resource Study: Little River Canyon Area, Cherokee, DeKalb and Etowah counties, Alabama*, 1991.
- Summary of the management objectives workshop held July 12-13, 1993.
- Draft Statement for Management, 1994.
- *Management Policies*, 1988.

Numerous consultations were held and will continue during the planning process. Special acknowledgement is made of the following agencies for information provided to date:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
 - Division of State Parks
 - Division of Game and Fish
 - Division of Environmental Management
- Alabama Natural Heritage Program
- Alabama Department of Transportation

Two public meetings were held in September 1995 to explain the planning process and to receive comments and suggestions on issues of concern. Approximately 60 people attended the meetings held in Ft. Payne and Centre.

People indicated the Preserve is important to them because of its beauty and scenic views, the heritage it represents to those who have grown up around it and who have visited the area as a child and the educational, recreational and tourism opportunities it offers.

Issues identified included maintaining the existing character, providing facilities for public use, improving the rim drive and overlooks, making all roads safer, balancing the different uses of the area, providing for climbing opportunity, continuing hunting, eliminating misuse of the area, opening Canyonmouth Park and preserving the river and the canyon.

Recipients of this document include federal, state and local agencies, American Indian tribes, organizations, and individuals. The list of agencies, Indian tribes and organizations follows. The list of individuals is lengthy and is on file at the Preserve.

Federal Agencies

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
Department of Agriculture
—Forest Service
—Natural Resource Conservation Service
Department of Defense
—Army Corps of Engineers
Department of the Interior
—Geological Survey
—Fish and Wildlife Service
—Office of Surface Mining
Department of Transportation
—Federal Highway Administration
Environmental Protection Agency
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
Tennessee Valley Authority

State and Local Agencies

Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel
Alabama Commission on Indian Affairs
Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
—Division of Environmental Management
—Division of Game and Fish
—Division of State Parks
—Division of Lands
—Natural Heritage Program
Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs
—Recreation Programs Coordinator
—State Clearinghouse
Alabama Forestry Commission
Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Officer)
Alabama Office of Archeological Research
Alabama Department of Transportation
Georgia Human Relations Commission
—Task Force on American Indian Concerns

Cherokee County Office of the District Judge
DeKalb County Commission
Tennessee Commissioner of Indian Affairs

American Indian Tribes

Cherokee Eastern Band
Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma
Chickasaw Nation
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma
Mississippi Band of Choctaw
Muscogee (Creek) Nation
Shawnee Council
Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma
Tribal Registrar
United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee

Organizations

Alabama Appalachian Association
Alabama Band Fan Club
Alabama Conservancy
Alabama Mountain Lakes Association
Alabama Outdoors
Alabama Power Company
Alabama Regional Council of Governments
Birmingham Canoe Club
Conservation Fund
Coosa Valley Area Planning Commission
East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission
Fort Payne Chamber of Commerce
Hawkwind Earth Renewal Co-Operative
Jacksonville State University
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National Parks and Conservation Association
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The Nature Conservancy
Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments
Trust for Public Lands



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As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has the responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural and cultural resources. This includes fostering wise use of our land and water resources, preserving the environment and cultural values of our national parks and historic places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to insure that their development is in the best interest of all our people. The department also promotes the goals of Take Pride in America campaign by encouraging stewardship and citizen responsibility for the public lands and promoting citizen participation in their care. The department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.